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NICARAGUA/
COSTA RICA

RATHER: If, as some believe, Central America is a tinder box, then the newest flash point could be Costa Rica. That country today sent a 100-man security force with heavy artillery to its northeastern border with Nicaragua where there have been three cross-border firefights in the past six days. The force was ordered to retaliate if Nicaraguan troops opened fire again, and Costa Rica warned it might break diplomatic relations with the Sandinistas. The United States is also taking new action in Costa Rica. David Martin has learned the details.

MARTIN: The U.S. and Costa Rica are planning for the first time ever a joint military exercise to be held in Costa Rica this summer as part of the Reagan administration's continuing effort to contain the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. The exercise would resemble in part the Big Pine maneuvers conducted in Honduras in which U.S. Army engineers constructed facilities to be used in the event of an attack by Nicaragua. This summer's exercise will be restricted to about 600 National Guardsmen, such as these units which just completed a similar road-building assignment in Panama. Costa Rica does not have an army, but its small security force will take part in the exercise by serving as armed guards for the U.S. soldiers. News of the exercise began to leak out yesterday by accident from two very high-level, if somewhat confused, sources. GEN. JOHN VESSEY (Chairman, Joints Chiefs of Staff): The government of Costa Rica has been in, in touch with the southern command with the idea of perhaps having an exercise in Costa Rica, and that's sort of been on again, off again. CASPAR WEINBERGER (Secretary of Defense): We don't obviously do... VESSEY: I can't tell you exactly what it is; it's sort of a... WEINBERGER: We don't go anywhere where there isn't an invitation. I was mistaken. I had thought that the negotiations had been completed, but in any event, we don't go anywhere where we're obviously not invited.

MARTIN: U.S. officials are concerned by recent Nicaraguan attacks which Nicaragua says are in retaliation for Costa Rica's support of the CIA-backed rebel army of Eden Pastora, who is trying to overthrow the Sandinista regime. This CIA plane recently crashed in Costa Rica while ferrying arms and equipment to Pastora's men. Because of the border attacks, the U.S. is about to accelerate the shipment of military equipment to Costa Rica and has asked Congress for a five-fold increase in military aid. U.S. officials say Costa Rica is extremely reluctant to allow American soldiers, even engineers, on its soil and might still pull out of the exercise, but the fact that Costa Rica has gone even this far is one more sign of a widening war in Central America. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.